

# WORLD NEWS and PROPHECY

## Biblical Perspectives on Current Events

January 2000

Vol. 3, No. 1

# Ecumenism Gears Up for Year 2000

*The drive toward uniting Christian religions is gathering momentum.*

by Mario Seiglie

As the year 2000 arrives, the drive toward uniting Christian religions, called ecumenism, is quickly gathering speed.

Yet, if one is not aware of this trend, much apparently unconnected religious news can seem unimportant. This is unfortunate, for much of this news is indicative of a carefully orchestrated drive toward doctrinal consensus among the largest Christian denominations, especially during the year 2000. Prophetically, all of this can be very significant.

Without a doubt, Pope John Paul II is a leading force behind ecumenism. He has openly emphasized its importance in his apostolic letter titled

“The Coming of the Third Millennium.”

“Among the most fervent petitions which the Church makes to the Lord during this important time, as the eve of the new millennium approaches, is that *unity among all Christians of the various confessions will increase until they reach full communion....*

The approaching end of the second millennium demands of everyone an examination of conscience and the promotion of *fitting ecumenical initiatives*, so that we can celebrate the Great



Source: www.assisi.com

*John Paul II gathered 130 leaders of various religions in Assisi in 1986*

Jubilee [of the year 2000], if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium.... The ecumenical and universal character of the Sacred Jubilee can be fittingly reflected by a meeting of all Christians” (emphasis added throughout).

In order to attain closer doctrinal unity and boost declining memberships, many concessions are being made by Protestants and Catholics alike. *Christianity Today* (See “ECUMENISM,” page 3)

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Ecumenism Gears Up for Year 2000 — Review: *Hitler's Pope* — What's “Left Behind” in the Rapture Theory? — A Different Kind of King of the South

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Its purpose is to help readers discern the times and increase their awareness and understanding of the answers Christ gave to His disciples' questions: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

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Read *World News and Prophecy* as soon as it is completed. The next issue is scheduled to be available on February 4, 2000, on the Internet at <http://www.ucg.org/html/literat.shtml#4>.

The United Church of God provides *World News and Prophecy (WNP)* as an educational service for interested persons. The purpose of *WNP* is to help readers discern the times and increase their awareness and understanding of current events in the light of Bible prophecy. Although the staff strives for truth and accuracy in its reporting, analysis and Bible commentary, *WNP* is not a doctrinal publication. Articles do undergo both an editorial and a review process.

**“ECUMENISM,”** (Continued from page 1) reported, “Anglican and Roman Catholic leaders in May [1999] released a consensus statement on the papacy, saying it is ‘a gift to be received by all the churches.... Archbishop of Canterbury George L. Carey says recognizing the pope’s role as a spiritual leader is an urgent task for Christians” (July 12, 1999, p. 23).

On the Catholic side, two months later, Pope John Paul II declared that heaven is not a physical place but a “relationship with God.” A week later he said hell, instead of a place, is “the state of those who freely and definitely separate themselves from God.” These admittedly vague beliefs are much closer to what Anglicans and Lutherans teach.

Meanwhile, Lutherans and Catholics took a step closer toward reconciling their differences by recently signing a joint declaration on the doctrine of justification. “The accord was signed on Reformation Sunday by senior clerics in the German city of Augsburg. It marks a *symbolic end* to a theological dispute which triggered the Protestant Reformation almost five hundred years ago.... Luther’s thesis led to a religious revolution which divided much of Christian Europe and provoked decades of war” (BBC News, October 31, 1999).

On the Catholic end, a previous draft of this accord was hailed by Pope John Paul II as “an important *ecumenical* achievement that will encourage and reinforce the declared aim—that Lutherans and Catholics pursue the achievement of *visible full unity*” (Christianity Today, August 19, 1998).

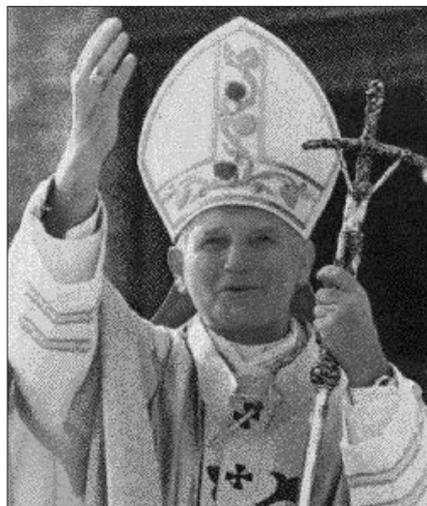
### What’s wrong with Christian unity?

On the surface, “Christian unity” appears to be a good idea. After all, who likes disunity? We also know Christ will one day bring true religious unity to the world—but on His terms. Zechariah describes this moment: “And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—‘The LORD is one,’ and His name one” (14:9).

Yet, in this humanly devised ecumenical system, the underlying motives and beliefs for unity are suspect. We can look at four common areas being stressed in the current pursuit for unity. They are: Sunday worship, trinitarianism, communion or Eucharist services, and the liturgy and formal prayers.

### Sunday worship

Sunday worship is a key tenet of the majority of churches seeking unity.



Source: www.catholic.net

Pope John Paul II is a leading force behind ecumenism

They see in Sunday a common bond, since it is the day when worship primarily takes place and where similar formats are used for communion services.

In his letter titled “The Lord’s Day,” Pope John Paul II stated, “The coming of the Third Millennium, which calls believers to reflect upon the course of history in the light of Christ, also invites them to rediscover with new intensity *the meaning of Sunday*: its ‘mystery,’ its celebration, its significance for Christian and human life.” During the year 2000, plans are being made in Rome to hold many joint services among different churches on Sunday.

Significantly, the recent accord between the Catholic and Lutheran churches took place while they celebrated a *joint service on Sunday*. The Associated Press reported, “Putting

aside five centuries of differences in theology, *Roman Catholic and Lutheran church leaders embraced at a service Sunday* where they signed a declaration ending a dispute over salvation that sparked the Protestant Reformation and led to the Thirty Years’ War.... The prayer service and signing ceremony included representatives of two dozen countries” (November 1, 1999).

Since Sunday is seen as a central belief of ecumenism, stronger words are being heard against those “nonconformists.” Yet, in the Bible, it is the Sabbath and not Sunday that is designated as the day on which God’s people worship Him. It was the Supreme God who said to His people about His Fourth Commandment: “Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (Exodus 31:13). Also, Jesus Christ expressly mentioned He was the “Lord of the Sabbath”—not of Sunday or any other day (Mark 2:28).

Consequently, true Christian unity should *first* be based on an agreement to keep the Sabbath holy or we will be going against God’s express will. It is that simple.

### Trinitarianism

Trinitarianism is the second area of consensus among most Christian churches. Even the World Council of Churches, founded in 1948, with a membership of about 500 million and encompassing 332 denominations, mentions its purpose is “to follow the gospel of *the Triune God*—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Although it faces problems, this organization hopes to soon add the Catholic and Pentecostal churches to its membership and thereby represent almost 2 billion people.

The pope’s plans for the Jubilee 2000 celebration at the Vatican are filled with trinitarian terms. He says, “A separate chapter will be the actual celebration of the Great Jubilee, which will take place simultaneously in the Holy Land, in Rome and in the local church-

es throughout the world. Especially in this phase, the phase of celebration, the aim will be to give glory *to the Trinity*, from whom everything in the world and in history comes and to whom everything returns” (“The Coming of the Third Millennium”). The teaching of the trinity has long been a major tenet of mainstream Christianity. Since the Council of Constantinople in 381 C.E., persecution and exclusion has been the fate of those groups who do not accept this doctrine. It is ironic that a teaching whose fruits have never achieved unity is invoked during a period intended to bring people of faith together.

### Communion services or the Eucharist

Another common feature of the churches that are melding together is their similar communion services that the Catholics call the Eucharist.

The pope puts great stress on this area. “*The year 2000 will be intensely Eucharistic*. In the sacrament of the Eucharist the Savior, who took flesh in Mary’s womb twenty centuries ago, continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life. The ecumenical and universal character of the Sacred Jubilee can be fittingly reflected by a *meeting of all Christians*. This would be an event of great significance, and so, in order to avoid misunderstandings, it should be properly presented and carefully prepared, in an attitude of *fraternal cooperation with Christians of other denominations* and traditions, as well as a of grateful openness to *those religions* whose representatives might wish to acknowledge the joy shared by all the disciples of Christ” (“The Coming of the Third Millennium”).

In this manner, these representatives of other churches and religions will be partaking at some level of the common communion cup being offered by Rome.

Lutheran and Anglican churches already have similar communion services. Dave Hunt writes about the Eucharist, “Martin Luther was unable to shake free from much of his Roman Catholicism (infant baptism, etc.), and

it remains within the church that bears his name to this day. While denying that they teach transubstantiation, Lutherans declare: “The true, real body and blood of Christ are somehow present, in a unique way, in, with, and under the bread and wine which are set aside” (*A Woman Rides the Beast*, 1994, p. 384).

The BBC news network reported, “The fact that the two churches [Catholic and Lutheran] are *worshipping together* in Augsburg, Germany, where the first attempts to make up were made 400 years ago, marks something of a *milestone* in church history” (October 31, 1999).

The pope is trying to convince other Protestant churches to compromise with their beliefs by joining this fraternal drive. Catholic editor Richard

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Neuhaus is quite frank when he writes, “To Catholics, *full communion* means everybody is in communion with the bishops *who are in communion with the bishop of Rome*” (*Christian Science Monitor*; October 29, 1999).

During this century, Pope Pius XII wrote, “We must not pass over in silence, or veil in ambiguous terms, *the truth of Catholic teaching*...that the only true union is by *the return of separated Christians to the one true Church of Christ*. For those who do not belong to the visible body of the Church...none can be assured of eternal salvation, because...they are still deprived of the helps and heavenly favors found *only inside the Catholic Church*” (*Mistici Corpus* document, June 29, 1943).

However, the Eucharist or communion services as they are taught, were not practiced by the New Testament Church. Instead, Scripture shows the apostolic Church faithfully kept the yearly Passover services, now filled with new meaning as Christ became the Passover sacrifice for their sins. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: “For indeed Christ, *our Passover*, was sacrificed for us. Therefore *let us keep the feast*, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

### Liturgy and formal prayer

A fourth common element which ecumenism stresses is the similar rites, ceremonies and established prayers. Webster’s defines liturgy as, “a rite or body of rites prescribed for public worship.”

Recently, the rites of several Protestant churches were unified. On October 4, 1998, members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church and the United Church of Christ, agreed to share ministers, sacraments and members. “The service opened with a four-way processional leading to a central baptismal font—the symbol of the basic sacrament of membership in each of the bodies. A common recitation of the Nicene Creed and a Renewal of Baptismal Vows emphasized common beliefs each tradition holds” (*Christianity Today*, November 16, 1998, p. 18).

For the year 2000, Pope John Paul II is emphasizing the common bond Catholics and several Protestant groups have with rites and formal prayers. He announced, “I therefore decree that the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will begin on Christmas Eve 1999.... At Saint Paul’s Basilica, the holy door will be opened on Tuesday, January 18, when *the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* begins, as a way of *emphasizing the distinctive ecumenical character of this Jubilee*” (“The Coming of the Third Millennium”).

## Ecumenism's final goal

Where is the drive to ecumenism headed? It seems right to where Bible prophecy said it would—to the formation of a global religious Babylon. Christ warned His true flock to stay away from a great religious movement which would be united in the last days behind the one He calls, “the false prophet” (Revelation 19:20). He said this man and system would eventually deceive “those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 13:14).

Christ predicted this religious movement would be enormously alluring, popular and powerful, but would actually be a false religious organization presiding over a great part of the world. He said about this great religious Babylon: “For *all the nations* have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the *kings of the earth have committed fornication* with her, and the *merchants of the earth have become rich* through the abundance of her luxury [economic union and profits]. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘*Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues*’” (Revelation 18:3–4).

### Two rivers, two opposing views

In his letter on the coming Jubilee 2000 celebration, the pope compared this amalgamating of churches to a great river, into which all the tributaries will eventually flow. He wrote: “On the basis of this profound renewal, the [Catholic] Council opened itself to *Christians of other denominations, to the followers of other religions and to all the people of our time....* Seen in this light, the whole of Christian history appears to us *a single river*, into which *many tributaries pour their waters*. The year 2000 invites us with renewed fidelity and *even deeper communion along the banks of this great river...*” (“The Coming of the Third Millennium”).

A great river flowed through Babylon, the Euphrates, which spread far and wide. Prophetic Babylon sym-



*Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of ecumenism in his apostolic letter, "The Coming of the Third Millennium"*

bolizes the same religious unity that Rome envisions for all religions.

Already, ecumenism is reaching out to Buddhists, Hindus and even pantheistic groups. “One of John Paul II’s most amazing feats,” writes Dave Hunt, “was the gathering at Assisi, Italy, in 1986 of *130 leaders of the world’s 12 major religions* to pray for peace. Praying together were snake worshipers, fire worshipers, spiritists, animists, North American witch doctors, Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, as well as ‘Christians’ and Catholics. The pope declared that all were ‘praying to the same God’” (ibid. Hunt, p. 424).

### A contrasting symbol— the Jordan River

In contrast to the many tributaries of this great river of Babylon, there is a much smaller river, where a few tributaries flow from Galilee and create the Jordan River. This river is narrow, as true Christianity also was described (Matthew 7:13–14). In this river’s waters Jesus was baptized *by immersion* (not by sprinkling), yet most ecumenical churches reject immersion.

The Jordan River flows through the

area where Joshua and the Israelites crossed its waters and claimed the Promised Land granted to Abraham, which is symbolic of the future establishment of God’s kingdom on this earth. This biblical truth about a future resurrection *on this earth* is very different from the undefined states of heaven and hell that are currently being taught in Protestant and Catholic circles.

The river also passes near the city that is Babylon’s opposite—Jerusalem, which Paul expressed as spiritually being “the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26). This refers to the Church where all true Christians belong—those who have “the love of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10) and keep their religion as pure and unadulterated as a pristine river.

Will the nations drink from the grand and popular river flowing from a spiritual Babylon, called in Revelation 17:1 “the great harlot who sits *on many waters*”? Or will they drink from the small but pure river flowing from the unpolluted principles of the Holy Land? Prophecy shows a spiritual deception is coming upon the nations. The elect of God will understand the difference between the holy and the profane. ❖

# Hitler's Pope: The Roman Church and the Third Reich

*Historian John Cornwell's biography of Pope Pius XII paints him as Hitler's enabler.*

by Melvin Rhodes

**H**itler's *Pope* is a provocative title for a biography of Eugenio Pacelli, better known as Pope Pius XII. The implication in the title is that the pope was Hitler's enabler. The title is deliberate, the implication substantially proved by the author, British historian John Cornwell, a practicing Catholic who has fallen foul of the Vatican and other leading members of the hierarchy since publication of this revealing book by Viking.

Anybody who is familiar with Europe will be aware of the close historical links between church and state in the various European countries. France severed her ties in the anticlerical turmoil of the French Revolution toward the end of the 18th century. The 19th century wasn't good for the church either. With the theory of evolution, socialism and rapid industrialization, the church lost power and influence. Garibaldi's unification of Italy deprived the Roman Church of territory, while the subsequent unification of Germany under the Protestant Prussian kaisers led to the anti-Catholic policies of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.

Desperate to reassert its authority, the Papacy reacted with the decree of papal infallibility in 1870, paving the way for increased centralization and papal authority. Six years later Eugenio Pacelli was born into a Roman legal family that had seen many years of service to the Holy See. Pacelli was destined to become perhaps the most autocratic of all popes, significantly shaping political events in the 20th century. His 19-year reign from 1939 to 1958 coincided with World War II and the division of Europe into the "Christian" West and the communist East that followed. Prior to becoming pope, he was Vatican secretary of state for 10 years, guiding the Vatican State's foreign policy.

## Resurrections of Roman Empire

The biblical books of Daniel and Revelation predicted the church's involvement in European

politics during the last 2,000 years (see principally Daniel 7 and Revelation 17). A church-state union was prophesied to be the foundation of seven successive attempts to reunify the Roman Empire.

It is relatively easy to look back in history and see the role of the church in the first few attempts to reunify Europe, to restore the glories of Imperial Rome, by uniting the various integral parts of the old Roman Empire. The first church-state union was under the Emperor Justinian who reunited the Empire in the middle of the sixth century. On Christmas Day 800, the pope himself crowned the Frankish King Charlemagne who attempted to restore the Western Empire. Less than two hundred years later the Holy Roman Empire was created to try to accomplish the same goal. Early in the 16th century when the Protestant Reformation posed a massive threat to the church, the Austrian Emperor Charles V and his son Philip II of Spain were strong defenders of the church-state bonds that had governed Europe for over one thousand years.

The next attempt to unite Europe was under the French Emperor Napoleon. The pope crowned him, too, but the revolution he brought to Europe was not favorable to the Papacy. Europe was entering an anti-religious age, which continues to this day.

The extent of the church's involvement in the resurrections of the Roman Empire already mentioned varied, but the church was always there, involved in some way. It has been more difficult to see the role of the church in the sixth attempt at European reunification, which culminated in two world wars that set Europe back decades and shattered the colonial empires of the European nations.

## Author thought to clear pontiff's name

There have been many accusations made about Pius XII's involvement with the Third Reich. Growing up in England shortly after the

*Rather than exonerating Pius XII, Cornwell's research showed that the wartime pope was instrumental in helping the Nazis.*

Second World War, I recollect that most people were critical of the church for doing nothing to stop the war, or to help the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. It was generally believed that the Roman Church had been pro-Nazi, though there was a realization that many members of the church had not felt that way and many bravely helped the victims of Nazism.

With the beatification of Pius XII being considered, Cornwell wanted to completely clear the man's name and sought permission from the Vatican to research his career in the service of the Papacy, a career that spanned six decades, including the century's two greatest conflicts. Rather than exonerating Pius XII, Cornwell's research showed that the wartime pope was instrumental in helping the Nazis and that he acquiesced in the annihilation of six million Jews. Further research showed that Hitler's rise to absolute power may not have happened if not for Pacelli. Indeed, Pacelli directly contributed to both world wars. Without him, it is quite possible that neither conflict would have taken place.

The book is far from sensational. Rather, it takes us through Pacelli's life and the world events that involved the Vatican during those years.

### Decree of infallibility

The Roman Catholic Church is a very conservative organization. Unlike any other church, it has sustained itself for almost 2,000 years, always actively involved in the world's politics, especially the politics of Europe. Church and state were inseparable. Right up into this century the Hapsburg emperors of Austria had the right to veto the choice of a pope. While the church taught its adherents the divine right of kings, the kings forced their people to be subject to the church in everything. The social order of Europe was built upon these two foundations.

When that order came to an end in the 19th century, the church had to reinvent and reassert itself. At a time of increasing democratization in many nations, the church became more autocratic. Faced with a republican mob in the Eternal City, Pius IX, crowned in 1846, "hurled denunciations against the 'outra-

geous treason of democracy' and threatened prospective voters with excommunication" (*Hitler's Pope*, p. 10).

"The historic decree of papal infallibility passed on July 18, 1870, by 433 bishops, with only two against, reads as follows: 'The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, exercising the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, he defines.... A doctrine concerning faith and morals to be held by the whole Church, through the divine assistance promised to him in St. Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer wished his Church to be endowed.... And therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church.'

"An additional decree proclaimed that the Pope had supreme jurisdiction over his bishops, individually and collectively. The Pope, in effect, was ultimately and unprecedentedly in charge" (p. 12).

"The Pope's Will: God's Will" was a popular expression at the time (p. 38).

One of Pacelli's successors, Pope Paul VI (1963–78), wrote in a private note to himself of the solitude that infallibility and the papal office resulted in. "I was solitary before, but now my solitariness becomes complete and awesome. Hence the dizziness, the vertigo. Like a statue on a plinth—that is how I live now. Jesus also was alone on the cross. I should not seek outside help to absolve me from my duty; my duty is too plain: decide, assume every responsibility for guiding others, even when it seems illogical and perhaps absurd. And to suffer alone.... Me and God. The colloquy must be full and endless" (pp. 2–3).

No doubt similar sentiments would be expressed by subsequent popes.

As Cornwell puts it: "The ideology of papal primacy, as we have known it within living memory, is an invention of the late 19th and early 20th centuries."

It was this deeply held conviction of absolutism and of the supreme role of the church in the affairs of this world that led

to Pacelli's controversial actions in the Nazi era. To Pacelli, nothing was more important than the Papacy. Even the lay members of the church were merely pawns in a great power game that was constantly being played out on the world stage. This becomes clear when reading of his role in both world wars.

### Pius XII's role in the world wars

Just four days before the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz

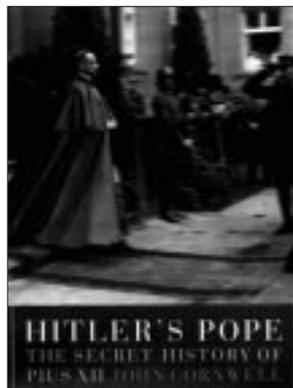
Ferdinand in June 1914, representatives of the Vatican and the Serbian kingdom met to put their signatures to a treaty known as the "Serbian Concordat," a document negotiated and drafted over the previous 18 months by Pacelli, then undersecretary of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs. This

was a direct agreement between the Vatican and the Serbian authorities, members of the Orthodox faith.

"Within the terms of the treaty, Serbia guaranteed that the Holy See had the right to impose the new Code of Canon Law on its country's Catholic clergy and subjects; that Catholics would have freedom of religion, worship, and education within its territories.... At the same time, the treaty implied the abrogation of the ancient protectorate rights of the Austro-Hungarian Empire over the Catholic enclaves in Serbia's territories."

The treaty effectively cut Austria off from any influence in Serbia, a move that angered the Austrians at an extremely sensitive time. "The result was a sharp increase in anti-Serbian rhetoric and calls for action. When the archduke was murdered in Sarajevo only days later, emotions were already volatile. The 'Serbian Concordat' undoubtedly contributed to the uncompromising terms that the Austro-Hungarian Empire pressed on Serbia, making war inevitable" (pp. 48–49). Conflict between Austria and Serbia followed just a few weeks later, leading directly to World War I.

It wasn't that Pacelli had wanted war.



It was rather that his single-minded obsession with the church and its own temporal power inadvertently caused a flare-up of tension between Austria and Serbia.

Less than 20 years later, as secretary of state, Pacelli again inadvertently contributed to the terrible events that led inevitably to the Second World War.

Hitler's rise to power was not an easy one. His first forced attempt at power resulted in his imprisonment, during which he wrote his book *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"). His National Socialist Party struggled on with minimal support as a small, bothersome party dwarfed by much bigger parties that held the reins of power. His opportunity for increased support came with the Depression when millions of Germans lost their jobs and hyperinflation wiped out peoples' personal savings. Blaming the Jews and foreigners in general for causing this, Hitler's popularity rose. But he still could not command power without the support of others.

Eventually only the Catholic Center Party stood in his way to absolute power. Here Pacelli was very helpful. Seeking a concordat between the Reich and the Vatican, Pacelli betrayed the millions of Catholic supporters of the Catholic Center Party by signing an agreement with Hitler that resulted in a ban on political activity by members of the church. It was the only democratic party left in Germany. With its disbanding, Hitler became the supreme leader of the country. Nothing stood in his way. The Vatican had even become the first state to recognize his odious regime, giving it tacit approval by its "Reich Concordat."

## Role in Holocaust

Anti-Semitism has always been a problem in mainstream Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church is not the only culprit in this regard. But a long history of anti-Semitism in the church contributed to Pacelli's role in the Holocaust.

Cornwell writes: "Christian antipathy toward the Jews was born out of the belief, dating from the early Christian Church, that the Jews had murdered Christ—indeed, that they had murdered God. The Early Fathers of the Church, the great Christian writers of the first six centuries

of Christianity, showed striking evidence of anti-Judaism. 'The blood of Jesus,' wrote Origen, 'falls not only on the Jews of that time, but on all generations of Jews up to the end of the world.' St. John Chrysostom wrote, 'The Synagogue is a brothel, a hiding place for unclean beasts.... Never has any Jew prayed to God.... They are possessed by demons.'

"At the First Council of Nicea in 325, the Emperor Constantine ordained that Easter should not compete with the Jewish Passover: 'It is unbecoming,' he declared, 'that on the holiest of festivals we should follow the customs of the Jews; henceforth let us have nothing in common with this odious people'" (pp. 24–25).

Persecution became the norm for the Jews in "Christian" countries throughout the centuries that followed. The Holocaust is the persecution that resulted in the most deaths in the shortest possible time. But it was just one of many periods of intense persecution of Jews by Christians.

Cornwell's research revealed writings of Pacelli where he himself showed clearly his anti-Semitism. This would explain his role during the Holocaust. At a time when the whole world knew what was going on and he resided in the center of the capital of one of the two major European Axis powers, Pacelli did not use his influence to condemn the Holocaust, to call for the end to the persecution of the Jews. He could have at least done this one humanitarian act, but he didn't, which raises the question why. This question has been asked for six decades.

Cornwell wrote in the London *Sunday Times*: "Pacelli's failure to defend the Jews cannot be seen in isolation from the development of the ideology of papal authority. From the very outset of his career he had associated Judaism with the Bolshevik (communist) threat to destroy Christianity. But his antipathy towards Jews went much deeper. Writing in 1919 to a Vatican official from Munich, which had become the centre of local Bolshevik agitation, Pacelli had described the revolutionaries and their chief, Eugen Levien, in his headquarters in the former royal palace.

"'The building, once the home of a king, resounded with screams, vile language, profanities,' he wrote. 'In the midst of all this, a gang of young women, of

dubious appearance, Jews like all the rest of them, hanging around in all the offices with lecherous demeanor and suggestive smiles. The boss of this female rabble was Levien's mistress: a young Russian woman, a Jew and a divorcee, who was in charge.... This Levien is...also Russian and a Jew. Pale, dirty, with vacant eyes, hoarse voice, vulgar, repulsive, with a face that is both intelligent and sly."

Like many, including Hitler, Pacelli equated Communism with the Jews.

A further extract from Cornwell's book shows that the Catholic Church was equated with the forces of extreme conservatism. "Catholicism appeared, on the face of it, to have links with the very right-wing nationalism, corporatism, and Fascism that sustained anti-Semitism or complicity in anti-Semitism on racial grounds. Practically every right-wing dictator of the period had been born and brought up a Catholic—notably Hitler, Horthy, Franco, Petain, Mussolini, Pavelic, and Tiso" (p. 280).

Pacelli wasn't just guilty of anti-Semitism. When the Allies entered Rome, he asked the American military commander of the city not to billet any "colored troops" there, out of concern for the city's women and children!

After World War II the whitewash began. The Papacy once more enjoys universal respect. Yet the factors that caused the problems highlighted in Cornwell's book persist to this day. History reminds us of the church's constant involvement in politics and of the disastrous consequences for millions of people. Prophecy reminds us that there is still one more resurrection of the church-state union that has dominated European civilization since the time of the Roman Empire.

Chillingly Cornwell wrote in the *Sunday Times*: "Liberal commentators insist that if Pius XII were to be canonized, he would join de Balaguer and Pius X—who was Pope while the young Pacelli wrote the laws establishing modern papal power—to form a formidable right-wing triumvirate of esteem. They would represent an endorsement through the next century of a centralized papal absolutism that proved disastrous for the Catholic church in Germany and, indeed, for the world as a whole." ❖

# What's "Left Behind" in the Rapture Theory?

*Millions have read novels structured around the idea of the rapture of Christians. Why this religious fad? Why do people believe there will be a rapture?*

by Cecil E. Maranville

**T**housands traveled to Jerusalem to be on the scene for the rapture on January 1, 2000. Yet the chronometers clicked over another year without it happening. Why do so many people believe there will be a rapture?

*Left Behind* books and videos have variably stirred, frightened or entertained millions. Jim Jenkins and Tim LaHaye have popularized in the 1990s the same understanding and expectations about "a secret rapture" that author Hal Lindsey did in the 1970s with *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *Vanished*.

The *Left Behind* novels all revolve around the story line that non-Christians are "left behind" when Christ secretly and suddenly removes true believers from the earth. Christians who are driving cars, piloting planes, living normal lives abruptly disappear—and those "left behind" must puzzle out their mysterious disappearance. What could possibly be "entertaining" about this you ask? Political and sexual intrigue is spliced into the religious theme of the books in the name of spreading the message to as wide an audience as possible.

Lindsey was the first modern writer to popularize the rapture theory and still writes and speaks on the theme. *60 Minutes II* recently caught up with him on a tour he was leading in Israel—still preaching that end-time prophecy "will begin with the rapture, which is the instant calling to heaven of all good Christians. People will actually disappear, Lindsey says" ("Apocalypse Now," CBS, 1999).

Jenkins is the actual writer of the *Left Behind* material and LaHaye checks the work for biblical accuracy ("The Trials of the Tribulation" by Michael Joseph Cross, *The Atlantic Monthly*, January, 2000). Their popular writings do not offer readers the theology of the rapture idea in a systematic fashion. That is, the books do not explain the scriptural basis for the dogma, or how one could prove it from the Bible.



*Left Behind books and videos, featuring a secret rapture, have stirred, frightened and entertained millions*

Asked to explain the rapture, proponents will point to only a few ambiguous biblical references that they claim teach and define the doctrine. And yet, it is accepted as fact by millions of people.

## The rapture doctrine

Webster's defines "rapture" simply as "ecstatic joy or delight; joyful ecstasy." How does this relate to the return of Christ? Explanations are somewhat ambiguous. Some point to the Latin translation of a single word in the Greek text of the Bible ("The Rapture—Prophecy Bible Study," Mike Cady, 1998). The Latin is "rapere," meaning "to seize" or "to abduct." The thought is that Christians are literally "snatched" or "seized" from the earth by Christ.

So widely held is this belief that the theological definition of "rapture" finds its way into Webster's as "the experience, anticipated by some fundamentalist Christians, of meeting Christ midway in the air upon his return to the earth."

Even this definition does not accurately reflect the prevalent explanations of the rapture theory. That is to say, rapture defenders teach that

*Proponents of the rapture point to a few ambiguous biblical references that they claim teach and define the doctrine. Yet it is accepted as fact by millions of people.*

Christ will do this snatching of believers before and separate from His return—not “upon His return.”

Christ, they say, will approach the earth, not return to it, to seize believers several years before His actual return—the Second Coming.

According to the most common version of the rapture:

- Christ revealed the rapture to the church through a letter written by the apostle Paul.

- This is a secret coming, evidenced only by the absence of Christians afterward.

- At the rapture, Christians will be changed to spirit and transported to the safe haven of heaven to wait out a seven-year Tribulation that occurs on the earth.

- The rapture’s purpose is not only to protect Christians, but also to motivate them to be spiritually ready at all times for their unannounced abduction by Christ.

## Scriptural “proof” for the rapture

What is the scriptural basis for this enigmatic doctrine? None of the authors of recent decades is credited with the development of the rapture theory. That credit goes to 19th century John Nelson Darby, “a brilliant British theologian and preacher” (“Apocalypticism” by Paul Boyer, PBS Online, 1999). While some advocates of the rapture occasionally refer to a few other scriptures, all agree that the main argument is based on verses 16–17 of Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

It is the Greek for “shall be caught up” that is translated into the Latin *rapere*, the linguistic basis some claim for the word *rapture*. But where is the theological basis for the doctrine? Where does it say here—or anywhere else in the Bible for that matter—that Christ will come near to the earth to remove Christians years before His prophesied Second Coming?

What Darby interpreted to mean that

Christ would come close but not actually return to the earth are three words: “in the air.” He took license from the fact that the verse doesn’t say that Christ actually returns “to the earth” to develop what has become known as “the rapture.” (Darby may well have been motivated by noble objectives, as we will note later.)

## Entire theory based upon inaccuracy

Before examining other aspects of the theory, it’s necessary to analyze these verses that are offered as scriptural authority. The entire theory hinges upon whether or not Darby’s understanding was accurate, for “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation [margin—origin]” (2 Peter 1:20). That is, true doctrine must come from God alone.

One of the most important keys to an accurate understanding of any part of the Bible is to read what it says in context. The context of these verses begins in verse 13 and concludes in verse 18.

Paul wrote this section of the letter in answer to heavy concerns of the local Christians. Was he responding to the concern of the Thessalonians about their safety in an end of the age Tribulation? No. Was he addressing their worries about whether or not Christ would return to rescue them? No. Was he writing about some neglect on their part of their spiritual readiness for Christ’s return? No.

Why, then, did Paul write 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18?

As you read verse 13, you discover that Christians in Thessalonica were grieving over the unexpected deaths of members of the local congregation. Like Christians throughout time, they apparently thought they would live until Christ returned. They were totally unprepared for death of people in the faith. Paul wrote that there was no need for them to be overwhelmed by grief as if there was no hope for life again.

The main point is explained in verse 14. The dead will be brought to life again. Paul doesn’t leave the subject there, but adds a time frame to this resurrection—“with Him,” that is with the coming of Christ. Did he mean an approach by Christ or did he mean the Second Coming?

Nothing here justifies any understanding other than the Second Coming. Neither is there any nuance of a “secret” coming.

Verse 15 amplifies the point about the future of Christians who have died by declaring that those who remain alive at the coming of Christ have no spiritual advantage over those who died. Said another way, those who have died are not at any disadvantage. All Christians, living and dead, will be included in the events described in verses 16 and 17:

- The return of Jesus Christ heralded by a powerful angelic announcement (hardly secret).

- The resurrection or return to life of dead Christians (the main subject addressed by Paul in the context).

- The simultaneous joining of those Christians and Christians still living with the returning Christ (not a separation of living Christians from the earth).

The final verse in the section concludes and reiterates the main thought. “Therefore comfort one another with these words,” that is, with the explanation of the destiny of Christians who died before Christ returns.

## Rapture ideology out of sync

Not only is the reasoning of the rapture theory completely out of context with the verses used to “prove” it, the theory is also out of sync with the theology of the rest of the Scriptures.

Another letter written by Paul about the same time as the one to Thessalonica also addresses the Christian hope of the resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15:50–53, he wrote of the promise of a resurrection or a transformation from physical to spirit life. This is a crucial point—what is the timing of this prophesied change from “mortal to immortal”?

Verses 22 and 23 are unmistakably clear on the matter: “In Christ all shall be made alive [resurrected]... those who are Christ’s [Christians] at His coming.” Paul said nothing to the Corinthians of anything like a snatching away before Christ actually comes, and he used no language that might imply a near approach by Christ instead of the Second Coming.

More is provided here about the timing. The prophesied change to spirit will

occur at “the last trump,” language similar to that used in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. A trumpet-like instrument was used “in early times chiefly, perhaps exclusively, for war-like purposes. It gave the signal ‘to arms’... warned of the approach of the enemy... was heard throughout a battle... and sounded the recall.... Afterward it played an important part in connection with religion. It was blown at the proclamation of the Law... and at the opening of the Year of Jubilee... heralded the approach of the Ark... hailed a new king... and is prophetically associated with the Divine judgment and restoration of the chosen people from captivity” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Electronic Database, 1996, “Music”).

Students of prophecy properly associate the Corinthian and Thessalonian trumpet references with the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15–18—the last trump, which clearly announces the Second Coming. The dead in Christ are resurrected, living Christians are changed to spirit and Christ returns to the earth all at the same time.

Attempting to read into a few words in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 the concept of a near coming before the Second Coming, and a different time line for the resurrection prophesied to occur at the Second Coming is not “rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Plainly, the rapture theory is in conflict with the Scriptures.

### “One will be taken...”

In their eagerness to bolster the erroneous rapture dogma, presenters of the theory point to many prophecies that plainly foretell Christ’s return to prove the rapture. They reason that their interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 requires Christians to be in a constant state of readiness for their unannounced snatching away by Christ. Prophecies of the Second Coming are not in doubt. What is in doubt is applying these messages to the forced interpretation of a pre-coming.

One such prophecy is Matthew 24:36–44. It starts with, “But of that day and hour [the Second Coming] no one knows” and ends with, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an

hour you do not expect.” Clearly, the topic is preparedness for the Second Coming.

Rapture supporters would have us lift verses 40 and 41 out of context. You’ll probably recognize them immediately: “Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left.” If one ignores the fact that the context of these verses talks about the Second Coming, they may seem to lend credence to the rapture.

But it is unsound theology to lift verses out of context. In addition, the understanding of any reference must coincide with the teaching of the rest of the Bible.

In the context, Christ makes plain the fact that no one knows the timing of His coming [not of His near approach]. His counsel, in light of that fact, is that Christians be constantly alert, spiritually prepared (“Watch therefore,” verse 42).

Now the understanding of verses 40 and 41 becomes clear. People who are not prepared will be caught off guard by the abruptness of His coming. Some who live or work close to others will be caught off guard while their compatriots are not. Some will be “left”—not “left behind” after a secret rapture, but left unprepared.

### Partial understanding

What reason did the theologian John Darby have for even considering such a doctrine as the rapture? An article on the Millennium in *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* offers a plausible explanation. In the century before Darby, Daniel Whitby promulgated the philosophy of “postmillennialism” in England. “This interpretation maintains that present gospel agencies will root out evils until Christ will have a spiritual reign over the earth, which will continue for 1,000 years. Then the second advent [Second Coming] of Christ will initiate judgment and bring to an end the present order” (1988).

It’s reasonable to suspect that Darby’s intent was to counter the false teaching that the actions of men could bring about the Kingdom of God—as well as the equally incorrect teaching that prophecies of a kingdom are only symbolic (called “amillennialism”). Darby believed, rightly, that Jesus Christ would return to earth

to establish and rule over the Kingdom of God (called “premillennialism”).

Regardless of his motivation, Darby clearly departed from the Scriptures himself with his rapture theory. At least he accurately understood that Christ would return to reign on the earth, which leads us to an important concluding point.

### Meet Christ in the air

Seeking to debunk the accurate understanding of 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, one author asks, “If [Christ] is already headed our way, why would we need to be caught up to meet Him?” (“The Pretribulation Rapture” by Todd Strandberg, 1999). That’s an interesting question and its answer reinforces what we have already learned from the Bible about this much misunderstood topic.

The answer lies in the meaning of the word translated “meet.” *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* says the word “is used in the papyri of a newly arriving magistrate. ‘It seems that the special idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary’ (Moulton, Greek Test. Gram., Vol. 1, p. 14)” (1985, “Meet”). Jamieson, Fausset and Brown add in their notes for these verses, “When a king enters his city the loyal go forth to meet him....”

How appropriate it is that Christians should rise to meet the King of kings!

F.F. Bruce’s *International Bible Commentary* adds, “to meet is used in the papyri of the official reception given to a visiting governor, whom his citizens escort into the city from which they have come to meet him” (1986, notes on 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Another key question to address is “Where will Christ be?” since we are told by Paul that we will “always be with the Lord” after meeting Him.

An Old Testament prophet answers: “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming... and in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives” (Zechariah 14:1, 4). Christ will not be in heaven after the Second Coming, but will be on the earth—and so will the resurrected saints.

Christians are resurrected or changed to spirit at the last trump when Christ returns and meet Him in the air as an escort of honor as He returns to rule the earth. ❖

# In Brief...

## World News Review

### Global Intelligence Update Decade Forecasts

*Stratfor, Inc. issued a series of forecasts for the coming decade for key areas of the world. They are well worth reading.*

**Aging U.S. baby boomers:** The first is for the United States. Stratfor foresees continued prosperity for the U.S. for the first half of the decade, with a potential downturn beginning after 2005. Two outstanding aspects of the analysis focus upon the changing demographics of the U.S. population and the indicators of the current political winds blowing through the presidential election campaign. When the baby boomers cease to invest in 401k's and begin to withdraw their retirements, this will profoundly dampen the markets. Regarding presidential politics, Stratfor notes that the philosophy of the fringes often has been a precursor of mainstream thought. On that basis, they speculate that the U.S. will grow increasingly isolationist—not in the next administration, but in subsequent ones.

**Asian military increasingly important:** The second region analyzed was Asia and Japan. Declaring that the future of Asia depends upon the largest nation and the largest economy, Stratfor centers its predictions upon China, the largest nation, and Japan, the largest economy. A glance backward reminds us that Asia recently seemed to be ready to surpass the U.S. economically, only to become embroiled in serious crises. "Asia will emerge from the current economic crisis in a markedly changed condition, but it will remain an influential and potentially dangerous region." The forecast sees potential national fragmentation in China. Japan is strengthening its military with a current defense budget of \$35 billion, surpassed only by the U.S. and Russia. The generation now assuming power in Japan will be less encumbered by past negatives. The Asians will look to create a political framework after the European model.

**Russia wants its empire back:** The third analysis, titled "The Pendulum of Democracy Swings Away From the West," focuses on Russia. Russia has bluntly rattled its nuclear saber once again, reminding the entire world that it wants to be thought of as a major power. Recent forays into Chechnya are indicative of a Russian intent to reassemble its old empire, a task that will take much of the next decade and that promises to be bloody. The assertion of military power has been popular with the Russian people. (Vladimir Putin's sudden assumption of the presidency came after Stratfor issued its analysis; it lends credence to the prediction.) Stratfor also looks for col-

laboration between Russia and China to limit American power.

**Competing forces in Europe:** The analysis of Europe is a remarkable amplification of the prophetic image of "partly of potter's clay and partly of iron" (Daniel 2:41), as Stratfor's analysts detail the forces working for—and against—continued union. Stratfor has been negative about the potential for the success of the EMU since before its inception, and offers a detailed explanation of why it's in the self-interest of some European nations to see monetary union fail. It's much more difficult to accomplish a monetary union than a united market. What the analysis frankly summarizes about Germany is startling. "German unification, at least for the past century, has signaled a coming war." This report doesn't predict that Germany will start another war, but looks closely at the dynamics at work.

**Peaceful Middle East?** The fifth analysis, "The Middle East: A Peaceful Backwater," assaults the senses with its title alone. With an understanding of biblical prophecy, we wouldn't choose those words to describe this pivotal region—even if it appears to be peaceful. Within the Arab countries, major change is imminent due to the aging of its leadership. Since republican leaders have been in power so long, there is no established means for a transition of power. In concert with that is the fact that there are strong indications of a rise in "Islamic Republicanism"—that is, a republican government in the European tradition that is Islamic after the Iranian model.

Arab unity, promised by Nasser and those who patterned their regimes after his republican, anti-cleric government, has failed to materialize. They have "failed either to modernize or [to] satisfy the psychological needs of their people." The situation over the next 10 years is ripe for a "resurgent and powerful fundamentalist movement [to sweep] the Islamic world."

What of Israel? Instability is foreseen as the nation struggles with its identity. "Is Israel a secular republic that happens to be ethnically Jewish or is it a Jewish state under Jewish law?" Nonetheless, Israel's ability to deal with Sadat, then Mubarak and now Syria's Assad blunted the one-time Arab goal of exterminating Israel. (As an aside, the analysis of the value of the Camp David Accord in comparison with the one-to-one dealings between Israel and Syria makes for eye-opening reading.)

Stratfor's overall prediction for the world from 2000 to 2010 is that we should expect a de-synchronization of the world's nations, a profound realignment.

Stratfor also issued decade forecasts for Latin America and Africa. Stratfor's Web address is [www.stratfor.com](http://www.stratfor.com).

## Anglican Church Lobbies for Catholic Crown

The British have long had a reputation as defenders of tradition. But especially in the waning years of the 20th century, radical changes have occurred. Suddenly the Scots have their own parliament and the Welsh a national assembly, not to mention basic revisions in the way Northern Ireland is governed. Even the House of Lords has undergone rather radical reforms.

Now there are fresh calls for revising the 300-year-old Act of Settlement that forbids British monarchs or the heir to the throne from marrying Roman Catholics. And many think that the disassociation of the Church of England from the crown would soon follow such a fundamental reform.

The parliamentary Act of Supremacy (1559) made Queen Elizabeth I and her successors the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The Act of Settlement followed nearly a century and a half later in 1701. It is only in recent decades that these two acts of parliament have been seriously questioned.

At present, separation of church from state plus the Catholic marriage issue are at the pinnacle of the Anglican agenda. As *The Times* reported: "The Archbishop of York, Dr. David Hope, the second most important figure in the Church of England, was joined... by other senior Establishment figures in urging a lifting of the ban on monarchs marrying Roman Catholics."

Media observers indicate that Number 10 Downing Street supports the idea of revising the Act of Settlement. The Prime Minister's wife is a Roman Catholic and their children are being brought up in that faith. One also recalls that in the '80s it was reported that Queen Elizabeth had to stop Prince Charles from sharing mass with the pope on a state visit to Rome.

The level of support for these changes is surprising. As *The Sunday Times* observed, "When the Archbishop of York agrees with Scotland's Cardinal Thomas Winning that it is time to allow a Roman Catholic to sit on the throne of England, something momentous is happening in the way Britain's Christians think about themselves and their relationship to the State."

To those who do not comprehend the importance of Bible prophecy or where such prophetic themes directly affecting European affairs will take the world in the future, these proposed institutional revisions may seem of little importance. But to God's people who do understand what the Bible says about where Europe is heading, both politically and religiously, they are highly significant steps in a long history of general biblical prophecies affecting the destiny of the British people.

Sources: *The Sunday Times*, December 26, 1999; *The Times*, December 27, 1999.

## Rise of East Asian Power Bloc

While the recent World Trade Organization meetings were marred by protestors, the more significant meetings may have been those held the week before in the Philippines. Asian leaders gathered for a summit meeting that laid a foundation

for the formation of a regional bloc of East Asian nations.

*The South China Morning Post* reported: "Leaders of North and Southeast Asian nations have signed a historic pact to strengthen bonds through closer economic and monetary co-operation.

"The mainland, Japan and South Korea joined the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in the first step towards the eventual creation of a giant East Asian common market, an economic powerhouse encompassing two billion people.

"Philippine President Joseph Estrada, who chaired [the] informal summit in Manila, said: 'If we persevere and work harder, maybe, the promise we fulfill will realise an even loftier dream. An East Asian common market. One East Asian currency. And one East Asian community—a family from the happy union of north and south'" (November 29, 1999).

A December 2, 1999, Stratfor report added this comment in light of the Malaysian turmoil: "Asia is on the threshold of abandoning its longstanding policy of non-interference. On Nov. 2, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad called on the region to form a pan-Asian security structure to promote peaceful cooperation. His move echoes a growing paradigm shift, as Asian countries begin to realize that threats to individual nations' stability threaten that of the entire region. The ongoing separatist struggles in Indonesia have strengthened this sentiment; the 10 ASEAN members, and Japan, China and South Korea have announced that they stand behind Indonesia's sovereignty. Although they now lack the military capability to support their stand, Asian nations are moving faster than ever toward acting like a regional bloc."

Stratfor predicts American "protectionist measures" will have a major impact on Asia. "It is vital to understand, of course, that a round of protectionist measures by the United States late in the decade will have profound effects on the international system. Most important, as the United States disengages from the Eastern Hemisphere, powerful hegemonistic forces will emerge in Eurasia that will tend to destabilize the international system as a whole. That will leave a politically resentful, militarily powerful America, suffering from serious but far from catastrophic economic dysfunction, facing an increasingly unstable world.

"It is therefore our view... that economic destabilization in the United States will contribute greatly to a massive rise in international tension late in the decade. Several great powers will arise throughout Eurasia, challenging American primacy. The competition among those powers and between them and the United States will be intense, complex and dangerous. It will lack the elegant simplicity of the Cold War, posing instead the mind-numbing complexity of the pre-World War I period."

Bible prophecy shows that in the end time massive armies from the east will converge upon the Middle East and Jerusalem in particular. These forces will gather to fight against Christ at His Second Coming. See Revelation 9:14-16 and 16:14-16. Events in Asia are moving, perhaps slowly for now, toward some form of cooperative effort that will have a major impact on the world in the coming years.

Contributors: Darris McNeely, Cecil Maranville, John Ross Schroeder

“KING,” (Continued from page 16)

Sultan created Oman.” He concluded, “We started with nothing.”

Mr. Rawas’ comment led me to the thought of what it will be like at the dawn of the Millennium as the world starts over from less than scratch as all will be in rubble due to humanity’s intransigence towards the returning Christ. What lessons on visionary leadership can be tapped into? Proverbs 29:18 states, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (King James Version). Having the “big picture” in front of you, developing the framework to hold it together, and motivating those you are responsible for is the task which lies before each of us as future “kings and priests” (Revelation 5:10) during the millennial rule of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that the Queen of Sheba ventured north to observe firsthand the wisdom of Solomon. Let’s reverse the compass and head south to learn a few practical lessons in wise leadership as demonstrated by the Sultan of Oman, a “different kind of King of the South.”

### The wilderness years

Perhaps Sultan Kaboos’ empathy for his people comes from his own personal suffering. His father had inherited a penniless feudal kingdom from his own father. European interventionism and technology had pushed the once thriving seafaring people (Sinbad the Sailor is a native hero) to the brink of poverty. The elder Said felt he could best survive by keeping his subjects ignorant and isolated. During his reign there were only three public schools in all of Oman with a total of 900 students. There was only one hospital operated by missionaries. All travel by citizens was on foot or camel due to cars being banned. But this form of isolationism was personally visited upon the younger Said in a unique way.

The elder Said agreed to let his only son go to Britain’s Sandhurst Military Academy, but gave him no support. Upon graduation, Kaboos was forced to serve in a Scottish regiment stationed in Germany to earn his keep. Later his father recalled him—but instead of getting a public role, he was locked away in a backwater palace in Salalah and for six years was allowed to see almost no one but his mother and a teacher of the Koran. The reason for the father’s harsh behavior toward his son remains obscure to this day.

Kaboos’ experience has been the experience of others, and may even be ours at this moment. Separation or suffering must be understood beyond themselves. Often men of historical stature have been removed from the center of society, in retrospect, seemingly as a form of preparatory molding for future service. At times it has been voluntary, other times

enforced. It may have been prodded by divine will or by public indifference. The test of these “wilderness years” has broken some individuals and molded others. Some have come out better people, while others have come out bitter. Interestingly, Joseph and Paul were imprisoned. So were Mandela, Sadat, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Both Churchill and Nixon went through their period of being placed on history’s shelf only to re-emerge more focused than ever. This test often clears the mind as it is devoid of the whirl and twirl of everyday happenings. Paul wrote some of his most personally candid and meaningful works from prison.

Anwar Sadat, no stranger to prison in his earlier revolutionary days, shared some pointed observations regarding his “wilderness experience.” “It was then that I drew, almost unconsciously, on the inner strength I had developed in Cell 54 of Cairo Central Prison—a strength, call it a talent or capacity, for change. I found that I faced a highly complex situation, and that I couldn’t hope to change it until I had armed myself with the necessary psychological and intellectual capacity. My contemplation of life and human nature in that secluded place had taught me that he who cannot change the very fabric of his thought will never be able to change reality and will never, therefore make any progress” (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey, p. 317).

Sadat would change Middle East history in a grand way. Sultan Kaboos, in his own way in his sphere of influence, faced a “highly complex situation” in what had often been referred to as simply the “Hermit Kingdom.” After deposing his father in a bloodless coup in 1970 with the aid of relatives and the nod of the British military, “Kabooos has been upending the old Sultan’s dictum that the best way for a traditional monarch to stay in power is to shut out the modern world” (ibid. Daniszewski). How have a ruler and his subjects worked together?

### “I always try to be honest”

Each year, before National Day, the sultan’s birthday, Kaboos tours the country with his ministers, camping for a few days in each region and meeting with the people. At each site the people wait until the sultan proceeds out of his compound to their waiting area to meet with them. Kaboos explained that he never permits television to cover these encounters because “if there are cameras, I feel as though I am acting, and I don’t like acting at all. I like to be absolutely honest with my people.” He said that one key to his success has been leveling with his people, again re-emphasizing, “I always try to be honest.” It is interesting that in Oman this



Source: www.omani.net.com

Traditional dress belies the rapid modernization of Oman

approach has been respected by a people who themselves are responding to newfound freedoms in an honest manner. From wearing seat belts, to not smoking in non-smoking areas, to refraining from littering, Omanis are more law-abiding than the citizens of other countries of the region are. This approach of personal communication and collective honesty has fostered an environment in which there is little sectarian division, political intrigue or squabbling with neighbor states.

How have these improvements been accomplished? Not by force! “The country has a small police force and an even smaller army, both of which are almost invisible compared with those in other Arab nations.” Seemingly, respect engenders respect.

Another key to his success has been in the sultan’s “ penchant for patient, calculated actions.” Kaboos said, “When you take a step, you ought to be worrying about the next step.” Again and again, it goes back to keeping that big picture in mind. The sultan, an incredibly busy man with so much to do, has a limited amount of time! He is not married and he has no heir apparent. The institutions of values he is striving to put into place must be stronger than any cult of personality. Additionally, Oman’s oil resources are estimated to run out in 25 years.

### **A responsibility to future generations**

What steps is he taking? His proudest accomplishment is the state-run Sultan Kaboos University where he points out with pride that a majority of the students are female. There are plans to charter four more private universities. He recognizes the economy must become diversified and education is the key. The sultan believes “that by teaching people to look after themselves, that you are teaching them the most important thing.”

He has appointed women to his Consultative Council, to being ambassadors of his country abroad, and as deputy ministers in his government—all basically “firsts” in the Persian Gulf Region. His goal is to transform the Consultative Council into a directly elected full-fledged parliament by next year.

Beyond all of this, he has applauded peace efforts with Israel and has openly called for Israel to be fully accepted as a nation of the Middle East. He was the only fellow Arab leader to applaud Sadat’s bold 1979 peace initiative with

Israel. Kaboos said, “I thought it was very courageous! Somebody had to start it, and he did it. We cannot continue to have conflicts and hostilities for the rest of our lives. We have a responsibility to future generations.”

### **Joseph had a dream**

Genesis 37:5–11 records Joseph’s famous dream of being the ruler of his brothers with all of them bowing down to him. The dream itself was a revelation from God. Perhaps we have not fully contemplated the dream was accurate in the sense that not only would Joseph be worthy of respect for who he was, but also for what he did for others. Joseph had a vision that he carried through family abandonment, false accusation and prison. Throughout it all, his comprehension of what God was calling him to do grew deeper. Abandoned, insulted and isolated, Joseph had to come to new realities concerning his dream. He would have to learn to work alongside people and serve others before they could capture his vision—and bow, not on command, but by desire. As Proverbs 29:2 says, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan.”

Sultan Kaboos was offered little, but he had a dream. He had a vision of where he wanted to go and what he would have to let go of to succeed—not only for himself, but also for his people. Instead of a little, he now has a lot—the respect of his subjects.

Do you have a dream? Do you comprehend its full ramifications? That it will most likely demand more of you than those

around you? Have you seemingly been passed over, shelved or have you felt that opportunity has passed you by? Have you ever felt as if you got a raw deal, while everyone else got the “grave train”? Well, there is a “different kind of King of the South” who has not encroached on “the glorious Kingdom,” but who is taking his backwater “Hermit Kingdom” and is turning it around with a vision of service and inclusion.

As Sultan Kaboos wanders out from his temporary compound to meet his subjects in the desert hinterland under the shade of a tree—his life’s actions echo the millennial refrain of “this is the way, walk you in it.” And he turns and asks us as we follow, “By the way, how’s your kingdom coming?” ❖



*Sultan Kaboos bin Said is turning Oman around with a vision of service and inclusion*

# This Is the Way... A Different Kind of King of the South

by Robin Webber

**T**he Middle East is a very tough neighborhood when it comes to nations dealing with nations. There is the continual challenge between Israel and her Arab or Islamic neighbors. There is the geopolitical quagmire of many of these nations sitting on much of the world's known oil reserves.

As students of the Bible read through chapter 11 of Daniel, they are aware of an evil "King of the South." Over the years, a number of potential candidates have been prophetically coronated by various preachers as being the "King of the South." Nasser of Egypt, Khadafi of Libya and Hussein of Iraq have all rotated through this process. Let me introduce you to a different kind of "King of the South," Sultan Kaboos bin Said (also transliterated as Qaboos). He rules the kingdom of Oman, which is about as far south as you can go on the Arabian Peninsula.

## "We started with nothing"

Sultan Kaboos' success story comes to life in an article titled "Oman's Arabian Knight" by John Daniszewski in the *Los Angeles Times* on December 15, 1999. Mr. Daniszewski shares the incredible legacy of a country and ruler that have both come a long way over the past 30

years due to Sultan Kaboos' vision. The story begins, "There once was a boy who was shunned by his wealthy and powerful father. He was sent to a foreign land to be educated. To support himself, he had to join a foreign army. When at last his father sent for him, the young man hurried home full of expectations—only to learn he was to be kept out of sight again." His story of rags to riches is coupled by the story of a kingdom that 30 years ago was more like the Middle Ages. The wooden gates to Muscat, the capital, were closed each night, the country only had three miles of paved road, and there were 12 telephones in the kingdom."

Today, Oman's 1.7 million people are a "paragon of development—webbed by thousands of miles of highways, linked to the rest of the globe by Internet and cellular telephones, open to commerce and tourism and currently building one of the world's largest container ports to take advantage of its location." As Mr. Daniszewski so aptly states, "There are few countries in the world that have come so far, so fast, under the rule of one man." History professor Isam Rawas, who was 10 when Sultan Kaboos came to power, recalls, "I remember it was like we were in prison. The country had been hijacked. The

(See "KING," page 14)